

Rickover's Son Says His Father Was Exploited

By IRVIN MOLOTSKY
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WASHINGTON, July 10 — To most Americans, Adm. Hyman G. Rickover was a man who rose from humble origins to the highest levels of government to make great contributions to the nation. But to his son, he was also a man who, senile toward the end of his life, was exploited by people around him.

Admiral Rickover, an early proponent of nuclear-generated electricity who became known as the father of the nuclear navy, died Tuesday in nearby Arlington, Va., at 86 years of age. He was buried today in a small, private ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery.

But his disputatious nature seems certain to survive him in what can be regarded, in a way, as a peculiarly Washington disagreement. Elsewhere, a person's death might lead to a fight over the money in an estate. Here, disputes frequently arise over the legacy of another kind: the assessment of a person's role in the nation and the person's place in history.

Interview in Toronto

In an interview Wednesday at his home in Toronto, Admiral Rickover's son, Robert M. Rickover, asserted that the admiral, while mentally incapable, was induced to support the much-disputed restarting of a reactor at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant, which had been shut down after an adjoining reactor was damaged in a 1979 accident near Harrisburg, Pa.

In return, the younger Mr. Rickover said, the company that operates the Three Mile Island reactors gave donations totaling \$380,000 to an educational foundation the admiral had formed.

The younger Mr. Rickover further said that the company, General Public Utilities, gained his father's endorsement even though the admiral had come to oppose nuclear power plants for their potential danger and the problem of disposing of nuclear waste.

In response, General Public Utilities, the head of Admiral Rickover's foundation and a scientist who worked with the admiral at Three Mile Island all denied the son's assertions. In fact, they said, the admiral was not exploited and was not senile and remained supportive of nuclear power.

Joann P. DiGennaro, the head of Admiral Rickover's foundation, particularly disputed the assertion that the admiral was not capable of assessing nuclear safety issues. Although he might have had lapses of memory, she said, "I will say he was not senile."

The chairman of General Public Utilities, William G. Kuhns, said at

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Robert Rickover,
the admiral's son

*I recall his talk, ?
1979, he denied
nuclear safety
guarantee*



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the son's charges, "Why, at the time of his father's death, when he is unable to reply, does this matter come up?"

Robert Rickover, an economist, and his wife, Jane, a writer, addressed that question in the interview.

"What we are saying is an act of love, in support of his principles," Mrs. Rickover said of her father-in-law. Her husband put in, "As his son, I am interested in seeing his reputation safeguarded."

This reputation, Mr. Rickover asserted, should consist of a record that showed his father's leadership in the development of nuclear power and an evolving belief later that "mankind was going to destroy itself with nuclear arms."

Alternatively, Mr. Rickover said, the admiral feared that nuclear power plant accidents would destroy the world, a concern that the younger man said he shared. It was this belief that the son said was improperly pushed aside by people who exploited his father and got him to endorse the restarting at Three Mile Island.

"He was ruthlessly exploited at a time when he was not mentally competent," Mr. Rickover said. "For a few hundred thousand dollars — that didn't go to him — he was ruthlessly exploited over the very issue that was paramount to him."

That paramount issue was nuclear

safety, something that Admiral Rickover bullied people over when he was a younger man but something that his son says he was not capable of assessing in his declining years.

Mrs. Rickover said that Mrs. DiGennaro was among those who manipulated Admiral Rickover. But Mrs. DiGennaro suggested that Mr. Rickover's statements since his father's death reflected the younger man's own antinuclear philosophies and strains in the father-son relationship. "I don't know how to respond to a son who says that," Mrs. DiGennaro said, "except to say that I wish he had seen his father more often."

At the time of his involvement at Three Mile Island, Mr. Rickover asserted, his father no longer had the mental ability to assess the operation of a nuclear power plant. And, he said, after the reactor was restarted, in October 1985, the utility's contributions to his foundation ceased.

Mr. Kuhns, the General Public Utilities chairman, said of the admiral: "He was not senile, though I am not an expert. He did have occasional lapses of short-term memory. I am appalled that his son felt that way. I don't know how often he saw him; maybe he saw him during his periods of memory loss. He would tire toward the end of the day."

Mr. Kuhns also said he was appalled by the younger Mr. Rickover's statement that his father felt that nu-

clear power plants ought to be scrapped. Mr. Kuhns said Admiral Rickover never expressed a view that the plants ought to be scrapped, and he said the admiral took an active role at Three Mile Island. Mrs. DiGennaro said, "His father did not oppose nuclear power; he opposed the sloppy use of it."

Asked whether his company had exploited Admiral Rickover, Mr. Kuhns said it had not. "How do you exploit Admiral Rickover?" he asked, alluding to the admiral's well-earned reputation for dominating any situation he found himself in. "I had enormous respect for this man. He was just a super man. Certainly, as he aged, I saw the signs. But he was rational. He was focusing on doing the job."

Mr. Kuhns acknowledged that his company had made the \$25,000 monthly payments to Admiral Rickover's foundation and that they had been reduced and then halted when the reactor was restarted. Mr. Kuhns was asked if the payments represented a quid pro quo, a payment to Admiral Rickover's foundation in return for a favorable finding.

'Absolutely Not'

"You don't buy Admiral Rickover," Mr. Kuhns answered. "We were paying money in anticipation of his work and report. Are you saying that we bought a favorable report? Absolutely not."

Asked whether the \$380,000 in payments were excessive, he said he did not regard them so.

Robert V. Laney, one of the scientists recruited by Admiral Rickover to serve with him on a committee assessing the ability of General Public Utilities to manage Three Mile Island, supported Mr. Kuhns.

Asked if he would say that Admiral Rickover was mentally competent at the time of the Three Mile Island inquiry, Mr. Laney answered, "Yes, I would."

Admiral Rickover took an active part in the scientists' discussions, Mr. Laney said, adding, "He was very much in the land of the living."

A memorial service for Admiral Rickover is to be held Monday at the National Cathedral. His son did not attend the small burial service today. He said he had said his own goodbyes to his father last week.